

Senators' Queries Rejected by Envoy

By Warren Unna

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Another U.S. ambassador invoked executive privilege before a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee yesterday, this time by refusing to answer questions about the extent of American intelligence commitments to Nationalist China.

Walter J. McConaughy, ambassador to Taiwan, told senators he was following instructions from John R. Stevenson, State Department legal adviser, in refusing to answer their questions. He presented a letter from Stevenson instructing him to remain silent on intelligence matters.

Last week, Leonard Unger, ambassador to Thailand, refused to answer similar questions, also on instructions from Stevenson.

Both ambassadors were among a large group of witnesses who have appeared in closed session before the Senate subcommittee headed by Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) The subcommittee is exploring U.S. commitments abroad.

Yesterday, McConaughy was questioned under oath. When the questioning reached intelligence commitments to Taiwan, presumably including spy plane surveillance over Communist China, he declined to answer.

One subcommittee member said afterwards that it was "intolerable" that the ambassadors were instructed by State not to answer these questions. The subcommittee, he said, "simply won't accept it."

Two weeks ago, Sen. J. W. Fulbright (D-Ark.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told the Senate that the surveillance flights over China had been quietly suspended in March, 1968, and then resumed the following October. He noted that shortly after the resumption of spy flights the Communist Chinese reportedly shot down a U.S. airplane.

Fulbright questioned whether renewed spying over China might not be inconsistent with the Nixon administration's new initiative for trying to ease Sino-American tensions.

During Ambassador Unger's appearance before the Symington subcommittee, he refused to answer "six or eight questions" concerning U.S. intelligence commitments in Thailand. One of the questions concerned a reported U.S. subsidy to the Thais for their operations in neutral Laos.

Unger was summoned back and he appeared with Richard Helms, director of the Central Intelligence Agency. He still refused to answer the questions.

Some subcommittee members charged that the Helms' unprecedented appearance as Unger's chaperone was an attempt to intimidate Unger.

Nevertheless, Unger made a third appearance before the subcommittee last Friday and at that time answered their questions.

A subcommittee member said yesterday he assumed that McConaughy would eventually discuss intelligence commitments to Taiwan, too.

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Wednesday - 19 November 1969

25X1 1. [] Representative John O. Marsh (D., Va.) called to say that he and Representative Burt Talcott (R., Calif.) had separately raised with Chairman Mahon, of the Appropriations Committee, the possibility of bringing some of their colleagues to the Agency for a breakfast briefing. According to Marsh, Mahon had told them both that he thought this would be a good idea and he would call the Agency about it. I explained to Marsh that we would prefer to let the matter rest until the Chairman did call since we wanted to be quite sure we handled the matter in accordance with his wishes. Marsh said this would be satisfactory with him but that he hoped that we could go ahead on 26 November, since Talcott had already mentioned the possibility to Representatives Wyatt (R., Oreg.), Wyman (R., N.H.), and McDade (R., Penna.). Marsh said he had not contacted any of his Democratic colleagues and would hold off until he heard from us.

25X1 2. [] Advised Representative John O. Marsh (D., Va.) that Mr. Maury had made extensive checks in the Executive Branch including the Department of State and the Department of Defense and was unable to find the existence of any approval procedure or mechanism covering National Science Foundation's use of counterpart funds for research purposes. Marsh thanked us for looking into this and again expressed his opinion that there should be such a mechanism.

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25X1 4. [] Saw William Woodruff, on the staff of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and advised him of the Director's appearance before the Symington Subcommittee with Ambassador Unger on Monday, pointing out that the Director was not called upon.

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Senators, Secrets, and Laos

SEN. J. WILLIAM FULBRIGHT is getting a lot of headlines these days with his "disclosure" that the U.S. is spending \$150 million a year to arm, train, supply and transport a "secret army" in Laos.

The chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and his friends do not "approve of this kind of activity," meaning the Central Intelligence Agency's helping a 36,000-man army of Meo tribesmen to fight the North Vietnamese invaders of Laos.

All this is now being presented in a breathless way to give the impression that we are up to something dastardly in the far-off jungle kingdom and that it is being done without the knowledge of Congress.

* * *

IT'S TRUE THAT the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon Administrations did not exactly issue press handouts about their undercover military moves in Laos. No government is quite that candid.

But this does not mean Congress was kept in the dark. Most good newspapers, including the Rocky Mountain News and three papers published in Washington, have run prominently displayed stories about the "secret war in Laos" on and off since 1963. This information and a lot more was available to congressmen who took the trouble to inform themselves.

Putting aside the slightly phony issue of secrecy, it's worth reviewing what is going on in Laos.

For one thing, U.S. planes are bombing the Ho Chi Minh Trail, that complex of roads in Laos that Hanoi uses to infiltrate men and weapons into South Viet Nam, where they kill U.S.

and allied troops. We trust no U.S. senator objects to efforts to impede this deadly flow.

Hanoi also has about 45,000 regular soldiers in Laos, where they are attempting to destroy the legitimate government of Prince Souvanna Phouma, a respected neutralist. Sen. Fulbright is less than correct when he speaks of a "regular civil war" between government forces and the pro-Communist Pathet Lao.

Most experts agree that the Pathet Lao, the native rebels, hardly would be a threat to Souvanna Phouma without the massive intervention of the North Vietnamese. It was to resist this illegal invasion that the CIA and U.S. military advisers organized the guerrilla army of Meo tribesmen.

* * *

WHAT HAS BEEN the result so far? The government of Souvanna Phouma, which is friendly to the U.S., has survived. The North Vietnamese army has been stopped from moving to the borders of Thailand, a country that is friendly and allied to us.

Even with our limited help, Laos may not be able to resist the North Vietnamese Communists forever. But to date the U.S. has got strategic value for its money there. In fact, the \$150 million is probably better spent than a similar amount in subsidies to rich farmers in Sen. Fulbright's Arkansas or for pork-barrel projects in that state.

Rather than carp about Laos and places like it, there is something Congress might do: Issue a medal for CIA agents—reviled, denounced, and suspected—who get killed in our national interests in dirty little wars half a world away.